Media and Marketing

Spiritualized
Amazing Grace®

(Sanctuary Records Group; September 9)

SPIRITUALIZED SIGN DEAL WITH SANCTUARY RECORDS GROUP
TOUR SET FOR FALL 2003

(dates on back)

Sanctuary Records Group is pleased to announce an exclusive, worldwide recording agreement with Spiritualized. An album of new material, ***Amazing Grace®***, will be released this fall. The band is currently scheduling extensive live dates in the UK, US and Europe to support the new album, to be released on J Spaceman's own Spaceman Records through the Sanctuary Records Group.

Spiritualized recently parted company with BMG/Arista by mutual agreement ending an association with the label stretching back to the group's first single release in 1990.

Ged Doherty, President - Music Division, BMG UK, commented: "Jason Pierce is an incredible artist. Spiritualized's last album, ***Let It Come Down*** was a truly great piece of work. We wish Jason well for the future and my respect for his talent remains undiminished."

Merck Mercuriadis, CEO Sanctuary Records Group stated, "We are delighted to be working with Jason and Spiritualized. He is responsible for three of the most important albums of the last 10 years and ***Amazing Grace®*** takes the band in to the future at the same remarkable pace. Spiritualized are a band that is continually pushing the envelope and they give people who give a fuck about music a reason to smile."

The new LP, ***Amazing Grace®*** was essentially recorded in only three weeks at Rockfield Studios last October. It represents Spiritualized at their most exciting, energized, raw and heartfelt.

The tracks were recorded live, with the band learning each song from scratch and realizing a finished take usually within a day. According to Spiritualized's J Spaceman, it is the "least constructed and best recorded LP Spiritualized have made. The most important point was to create the energy that you only usually get on live shows."

He continues, "The band had become so electric through playing live, I wanted to be able to capture the best of that experience on the sessions." The band completed a full year on the road at the end of last summer, following the release of ***Let It Come Down*** in September 2001, and comprised Spaceman, John Coxon, Doggen, Thighpaulsandra, Tom Edwards and Kevin Bales. Drummer Kevin Bales fell ill at the end of that final tour, and was replaced for most of the sessions by Jonny Aitken.

"I made a decision from the outset that this record would not be processed," added Spaceman and as a result, ***Amazing Grace®*** is "a document of a recording of what it was like on each day."

"Once we had done the sessions I tried to refrain from embellishing anything.

59 West 19th St., Suite 4A • New York, NY 10011 • (ph) 212-989-2222 (fx) 212-989-1499
www.girlieaction.com

GIRLIE ACTION
Media and Marketing

There are overdubs on certain tracks but they are pretty minimal. These are the songs in the most unaffected state that we could record them. Each track on this record sounds different. It's quite dislocated and fractured the way it goes from one style to the next," he explains further.

Any overdubs were done after the Rockfield sessions were completed and these include contributions from British jazz giants Evan Parker (sax) and Kenny Wheeler (trumpet) with whom Spaceman and John Coxon recorded as part of the Spring Heel Jack project, Amassed.

In the month prior to the album's release, three special 12" vinyl only EP's will be released, incorporating all the tracks from ***Amazing Grace***®. EP1 (out August 19th) features "Cheapster," "Hold On," "Never Going Back" and "The Power and the Glory." EP2 (out August 26th) is "Lord Let It Rain on Me," "Oh Baby," "Rated X" and "Lay It Down Slow." The final EP (out September 2nd) will be "She Kissed Me (It Felt Like a Hit)," "This Little Life Of Mine" and "The Ballad Of Richie Lee."

SPIRITUALIZED LP DISCOGRAPHY

1992 *LAZER GUIDED MELODIES*
1993 *FUCKED UP INSIDE*
1995 *PURE PHASE*
1997 *LADIES & GENTLEMEN WE ARE FLOATING IN SPACE*
1998 *ROYAL ALBERT HALL OCTOBER 10 1997 LIVE*
2001 *LET IT COME DOWN*
2003 *THE COMPLETE WORKS PART 1*
2003 *AMAZING GRACE* ®

Do not miss Spiritualized live.

10/10/03 New Haven, CT @ Toad's Place
10/11/03 Boston, MA @ Avalon Ballroom
10/13/03 New York, NY @ Irving Plaza
10/14/03 New York, NY @ Irving Plaza
10/15/03 New York, NY @ Irving Plaza
10/17/03 Providence, RI @ Lupo's
10/18/03 Montreal, QUE @ Club Soda
10/19&20 Toronto, ONT @ Opera House
10/22/03 Pittsburgh, PA @ Club Laga
10/23/03 Cleveland, OH @ Agora Theatre
10/24/03 Cincinnati, OH @ Bogart's
10/25/03 Detroit, MI @ St. Andrews Hall
10/27/03 Indianapolis, IN @ The Vogue
10/28/03 Chicago, IL @ Vic Theatre
10/30/03 Minneapolis, MN @ First Ave
10/31/03 Madison, WI @ Barrymore
11/1/03 Columbia, MO @ Blue Note
11/2/03 Lawrence, KS @ Granada
11/4/03 Englewood, CO @ The Gothic Theatre
11/5/03 Salt Lake City, UT @ DV8
11/7/03 Portland, OR @ Roseland Ballroom
11/8/03 Seattle, WA @ The Showbox
11/9/03 Vancouver, BC @ Commadore
11/11/03 San Francisco, CA @ Bimbo's
11/12/03 San Francisco, CA @ Bimbo's
11/13/03 Los Angeles, CA @ Avalon Theatre
11/14/03 Los Angeles, CA @ Avalon Theatre
11/15/03 San Diego, CA @ 4th & B Theater
11/16/03 Tempe, AZ @ Marquee Theatre
11/18/03 Austin, TX @ The Mercury
11/19/03 Austin, TX @ The Mercury
11/20/03 Dallas, TX @ Gypsy Tea Room
11/21/03 New Orleans, LA @ House of Blues
11/22/03 Atlanta, GA @ Earthlink Live Center

All dates with Soledad Brothers!

For more on Spiritualized, don't hesitate to call.

Chloe, x139
Chloe@girlie.com

Jessica, x133
Jessica@girlie.com

59 West 19th St., Suite 4A • New York, NY 10011 • (ph) 212-989-2222 (fx) 212-989-1499
www.girlieaction.com

SPIN
October 2003

Spiritualized

Amazing Grace

Spaceman/Sanctuary

Garage rock from Mars

Recently released census figures indicate that Detroit has lost some 26,219 citizens since 2000. However, that loss is more than made up for by all the bands around the world who have set themselves up as honorary Rock City residents. Latest to go all White Panther on our asses is Spiritualized, whose *Amazing Grace* is at peak moments an amazingly graceful representation of MC5/Stooges skid marks on a psychedelic superhighway. Frontman Jason Pierce even says it was the White Stripes' let-it-fly recording style that gave him the inspiration to record all these songs mostly live in three weeks. Next thing you know he'll be dating his "sister."

They do the garage thing a lot better—and, crucially, a lot more casually—than Primal Scream did last year on *Evil Heat*. Casual is not something you'd ordinarily call Spiritualized, not after the 110-member orchestra, the gospel choir, and the four-year wait for 2001's *Let It Come Down*. But *Amazing Grace* finds redemption, uplift, hope, all in the moment, rather than in the grand gesture. Songs like "Never Goin Back" and "She Kissed Me (It Felt Like a Hit)" don't need a *majestic* form, they just need to move air. Pierce sees the face of Jesus hovering over a Marshall stack.

On four or five ballads, Pierce exalts his slow-mo slump, curling up, mumbling in a crackly voice, and making you want to drop a dime in his cup. Maybe the record's best moments come when Pierce sounds like he's in total free fall, as veteran British free-jazz saxophonist Evan Parker and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler sit in on "The Power and the Glory" and "Rated X." Kick out the jams. RJ SMITH

Grade: A-

See also: The Stooges, *Fun House* (Elektra); Spring Heel Jack, *Amassed* (Thirsty Ear)

DAVID BYRNE • BEACHWOOD SPARKS • BEULAH • LAMBCHOP

MAGNET

REAL MUSIC ALTERNATIVES

RYAN ADAMS
EXILE ON VAIN STREET

SPARKLEHORSE
BEAUTIFUL MALADIES

JOE STRUMMER
THINK GLOBALLY

YEAR IN MUSIC SPECIAL

THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH
SPIRITUALIZED

NO. 52 DEC/JAN 2002

12 >

7 25274 83144 9

USA $3.50 CAN $4.50

HEY MA, SPACEMAN, WON'T YOU PLEASE TAKE ME ALONG, I WON'T DO ANYTHING WRONG ...

>> MAGNET Follows Spiritualized's Jason Pierce to higher places

By Jonathan Valania / Photos By Chris Floyd

Somewhere Over The North Atlantic, Sept. 25, 2001

Ladies and gentlemen, we are floating in space—35,000 feet above the Earth, to be exact. We're on our way to Ireland to tag along on a Spiritualized tour. It's gonna be fun, but there are some risks involved. As Americans, we're traveling under the threat of death from Osama bin Laden, The Evil One, who lives in a cave.

During the course of our trip, you might feel a little like Salman Rushdie without the bodyguards; hell, we all feel like that now. My advice is do like they do in Ireland: Keep drinking. I should also tell you we'll be arriving in the middle of the latest flare-up in Northern Ireland's on-again/off-again civil war, or the Troubles, as they call it over there, where one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.

Despite all this, or maybe because of it, I promise this trip will be worth your while. We'll witness the rebirth of one of the world's great live bands. We'll suckle sweet Guinness from the mother teat of Ireland while Spiritualized blows wave after shiver-inducing wave of ecstatic peace across our bodies. And we'll all come together. As the world crashes down around our ears, for a few minutes at least, we'll feel safe. This, my friends, is a *very* in-demand vacation package these days.

Plus, we'll get to talk in circles for many hours with Jason Pierce, the band's auteur. Ever since the release of 1997's *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*, Pierce has become the Head Shepherd In Charge of the Space-Rock Flock. We'll talk about drugs and God and volcanoes. About broken hearts and broken bands and broken records and how to fix them. And, in the end, we won't really have learned anything at all. Except this: Music, not religion, is the opiate of the masses. Religion is more like the cocaine of the masses—and the world doesn't need any more cocaine right now. Cocaine kills.

Before our arrival in Dublin, however, you should understand the events that have conspired to bring us together with Spiritualized are long and complicated, stretching back more than 100 years. For all intents and purposes, they begin in ...

Sils-Maria, Switzerland, September 1888

Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, writes *Twilight Of The Idols*, which contains the following passage: "For art to exist, for any sort of aesthetic activity or perception to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication." A year later, Nietzsche would, quite literally, go insane.

> "It comes across as a boast when you talk about [drugs]. Besides, it's not as if it isn't apparent in the music."

Planet Earth, 1889-1979

A lot of stuff happens.

Rugby, England, 1980

Fourteen-year-old Jason Pierce walks into a pharmacy and makes his first purchase of recorded music. The album: *Raw Power* by the Stooges. A decade later, having adopted the *nom de rock* J. Spaceman, he'll form a band called Spiritualized, which makes modern psychedelic/rock music. One particularly astute critic will describe Spiritualized's music as "Stooges for airports." Coincidence? Not really.

Rugby, August 1984

Pierce receives a government grant to attend Rugby Art College, which he promptly misuses to purchase an electric guitar and amplifier. Pierce meets classmate Peter Kember (a.k.a. Sonic Boom, a.k.a. Peter Gunn), son of a wealthy importer. Kember's initial impression of Pierce is that he's "someone who is very smart, but very lazy." Kember and Pierce bond over a mutual interest in psychedelic music and recreational drug use. Pierce turns Kember on to the Stooges. Kember reciprocates by turning Pierce on to the Cramps, Velvet Underground and heroin. They form a band that combines all four influences and call themselves the Spacemen. Later, they'll add a "3" to the end of the moniker, borrowing the number from an early Spacemen gig poster that reads "Are Your Dreams At Night 3 Sizes Too Big?"

"Taking drugs to make music to take drugs to" is their mantra and their methodology. At the height of Just Say No, they'll openly sing the praises of mind-altering substances to the media. They'll crown themselves kings of the one-chord drone, funneling *White Light/White Heat*-era Velvets and pre-mental-hospital 13th Floor Elevators through a mesmerizing prism of noisy trance rock. And they'll do it all sitting down, as do the audience members. In fact, some lie flat on their backs. Many of them have taken drugs to listen to music to take drugs to.

Via E-mail, Oct. 9, 2001, 2:07 A.M.

MAGNET: What role did drugs play in the creative process of Spacemen 3?

Peter Kember: It'd be a lie to understate their role, but plenty of folk have found our music enough to replace drugs for consciousness alteration. I always felt I was merely a conduit or antenna receiving moods/feelings and translating them into sound forms and lyrics in order to re-transmit the experiences that encapsulated our lives.

You have spoken very candidly about your heroin use during the band. Was that something you and Jason did together?

Sometimes. Not much. Jason took very little drugs during the S3 period—except lager and Jack Daniel's. I turned Jason and other band members on to LSD, etc., and though we used heroin together occasionally, I think it was always more my weakness. Not to say hash, weed, speed, coke and mushrooms didn't figure—they did—frequently. I never believed in turning on friends to smack. Jason made his own choice. I have not been a social heroin user ever; (it's) more a personal habit. It interferes surprisingly little, but for the effects of its criminalisation.

New York City, 1989

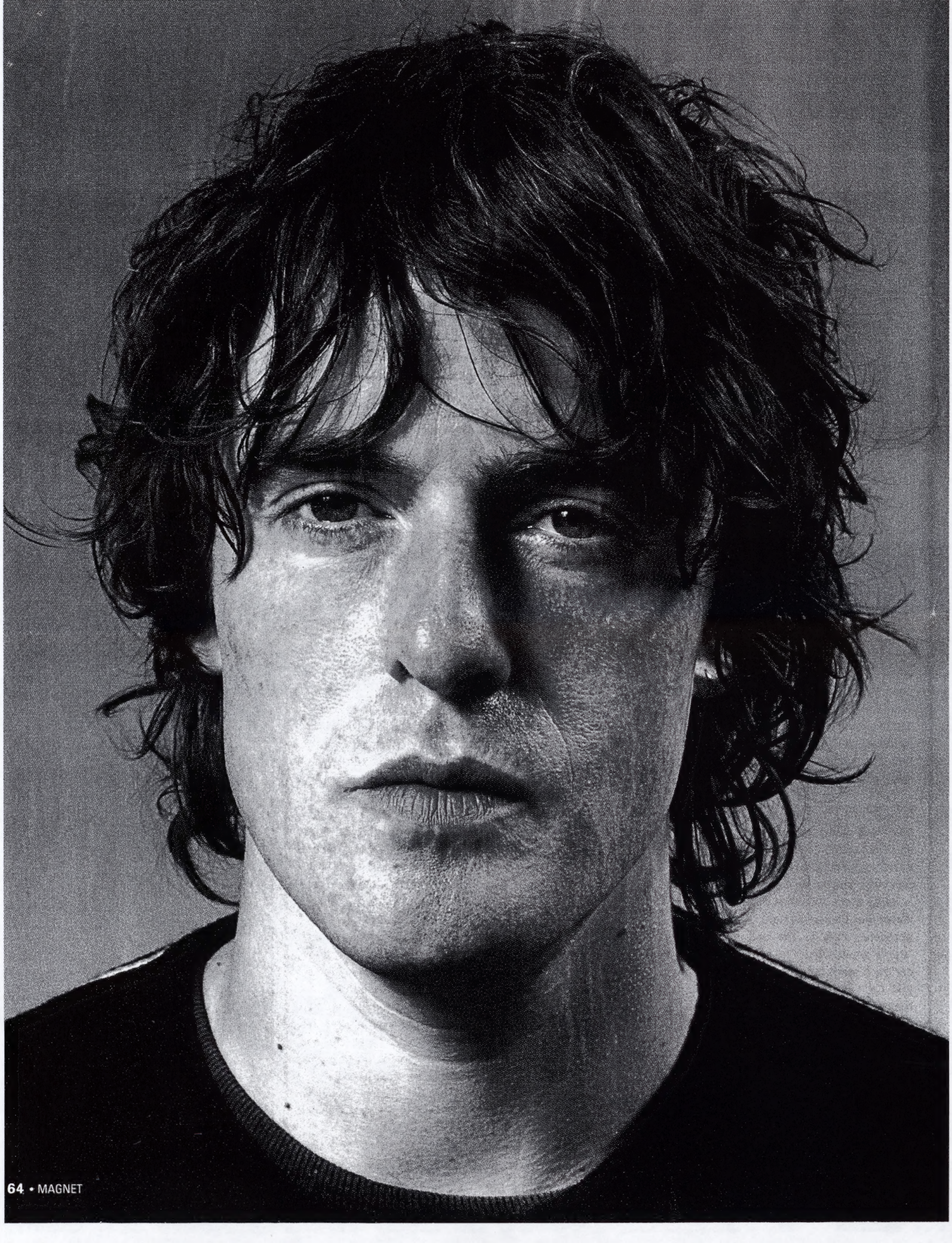
I have tickets to see Spacemen 3 and the Butthole Surfers. It will be Spacemen 3's first-ever show in America. I've already taken drugs to listen to music to take drugs to when I find out at the club that Spacemen 3 has canceled its tour. Word has it the band members couldn't get work papers because of drug convictions—which only serves to reinforce their narco-chic. Twelve years later, Pierce will tell me the tour was called off because he "had a nasty fall" down a flight of stairs. Kember will tell me the tour was canceled because Spacemen 3 broke up.

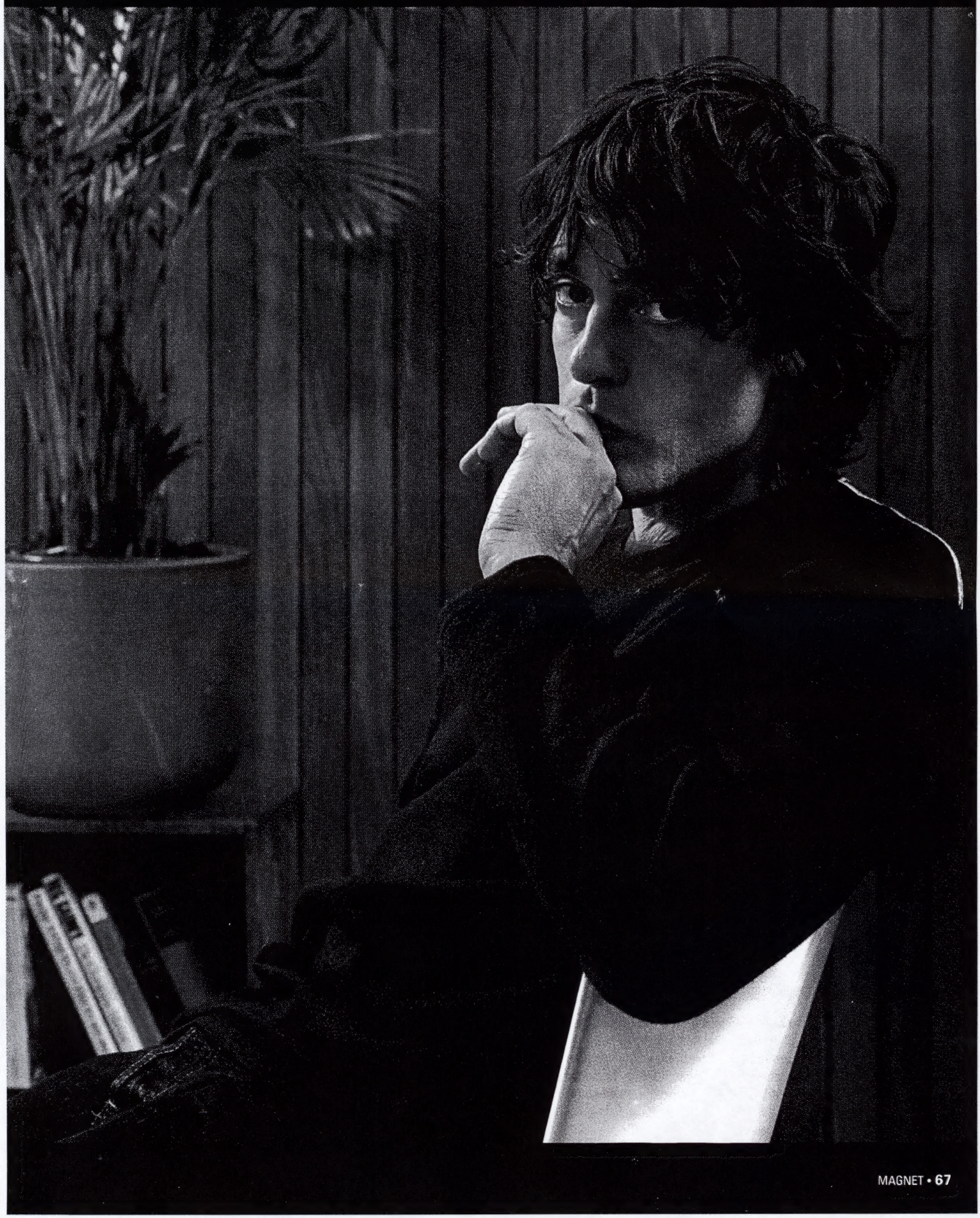
London, 1990-1997

Pierce forms a new band with girlfriend/keyboardist Kate Radley and everyone in Spacemen 3 except Kember. Inspired in equal parts by Aretha Franklin's *Amazing Grace* and the French inscription on a bottle of Pernod absinthe ("Spiritueux Anise"), Pierce christens the project Spiritualized. In 1992, at the height of British dream-pop, the band releases *Lazer Guided Melodies*, an aptly titled collection of ambient head-trip rock carved with clinical precision. "We got £3,000 to make a record, and I wanted to make it sound like *Electric Ladyland*," says Pierce. "Pete would not let Spacemen 3 do anything in the studio that couldn't be replicated live. So it was a massive freedom." Pierce sinks every pound into the recording, sleeping in the drum booth to save money on a hotel room.

In 1995, Spiritualized—which, by now, has already undergone the first of many lineup changes—releases *Pure Phase*, a woozy step forward in Pierce's never-ending quest to mix the perfect prescription of sound and texture. Unable to choose between two different sets of mixes of the album, Pierce enlists the services of trip-hop producer/Spring Heel Jack member John Coxon to accomplish the nearly impossible trick of running two mixes of each song simultaneously, one in each speaker.

Then some other stuff happens, deeply personal stuff, about which Pierce now has little or no recollection—and even if he does, he certainly doesn't care to share it. Which is understandable. In Britain, particularly in London, musicians lead more of a fishbowl existence than their American counterparts. The members of the British music press are so bitchy and gossipy, nobody would be surprised to learn





they walk around all the time with hair dryers on their heads, their hands soaking in a manicurist's fingerbowl. When Pierce and Radley split up and she turns around and marries the Verve's Richard Ashcroft, it becomes the hook onto which most of the reviewers hang their interpretations of Spiritualized's next album, *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*. Much to Pierce's consternation, the reviews always say something along the lines of "Guy from Spacemen 3 pours out his broken heart in a space-rock masterpiece."

"It's a lovely idea that I wrote that album about our breakup, but it's just not true," says Pierce. "I wrote 'I've Got A Broken Heart' a year before Kate and I split up. The math doesn't support it."

"I've Got A Broken Heart" may be the emotional center of *Ladies And Gentlemen*, but "Cop Shoot Cop," a junkie confessional in the tradition of Lou Reed's "Heroin," is its philosophical treatise. It sounds, on the surface, like druggy braggadocio ("Hey man, there's a hole in my arm where all the money goes"), but by the end, the lyrics turn more ambivalent, in much the same way "Heroin" ends with "I guess, but I just don't know." The first couplet of the chorus is "Cop shoot cop/I believe, I believe

that I have been reborn," but Pierce follows it up with "I haven't got the time no more." This is as close as Spiritualized gets to Just Say No. For reasons that will become apparent by the end of this story, it's important to know that famed New Orleans swamp rocker Dr. John laid down some of his trademark voodoo piano on *Ladies And Gentlemen*'s "Cop Shoot Cop." Remember that: Dr. John.

New York City, April 16, 1998

A year and a half of touring in support of *Ladies And Gentlemen* earns Spiritualized a well-deserved reputation for delivering some of the most transcendental live shows in recent memory. In a bid to play "the highest show in the world," the band performs at Windows On The World on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center.

London, April 1999

Spiritualized guitarist Mike Mooney, bassist Sean Cook and drummer Damon Reece receive certified letters from Spiritualized's manager informing them that "according to clause 1d of your contract your employment with Spiritualized has now been terminated." Mooney, Cook and Reece form a band called Lupine Howl and go public with how Pierce made them walk the plank from the good ship Spiritualized, painting him as a money-grubbing tyrant too zonked on heroin to have a conversation with.

"Sean [Cook] is not stupid; he's quite bright," says Pierce. "Some of the later things that he said were meant to damage me in the press, and obviously some of it sticks."

Pierce says the old unit mutinied, demanding more money from a band that was already operating at a loss (profits from album sales were negligible due to the amount spent on packaging and record-

> "I'm very empirical, and I like my science to be good science."

ing). On top of that, he says, they made booking tours—Spiritualized's one source of income, outside of the occasional Volkswagen commercial—impossible by demanding a day off between shows and turning their noses up at dates if the money wasn't good enough. "So I retired them," says Pierce.

Via E-mail, Sept. 20, 2001, 2:22 P.M.

MAGNET: How central were drugs to the creative process in Spiritualized?

Sean Cook: [At first], no one in the band really took drugs except (bassist) Willie (Carruthers) and myself. They have always played some part in my approach to music. After *Pure Phase*, drugs were more prevalent in the band—the effect they had was sometimes creative, sometimes destructive.

To what extent did drugs play a role in making it undesirable to remain in Spiritualized?

Heroin can turn a person into either a mumbling geriatric or an egocentric little kid and often a mixture of both. This can place a strain on a band.

What couldn't you do in Spiritualized that you can do in Lupine Howl?

Being in Lupine Howl is quite similar to being in Spiritualized, except the fact that there are no assholes in the group.

Abbey Road Studios, London, June 1999

Work begins on *Let It Come Down*, Pierce's titanic orchestral opus. Prior to actually rolling tape, Pierce spent a solid year in pre-production, transcribing hours of microcassette tapes filled with his hummed musical ideas into charts for horns, strings and a gospel choir. Although some songs on *Let It Come Down* feature more than 100 musicians, recording is wrapped up in a tidy three weeks. In what's become standard operating procedure for Spiritualized albums, Pierce spends the next year mixing and remixing the songs into a state of grace—or the closest approximation thereof.

Mt. Etna, Sicily, Italy, Aug. 29, 2001

The highest active volcano in Europe, Mt. Etna has been erupting on and off for 300,000 years. In mythology, it's regarded as the forge of Vulcan, the god of fire, as well as the home of the Cyclops. Knee-deep in black sand and flecked with the grey ash that falls like snow flurries, a man dressed in a silver furnace suit makes his way toward the edge of the lava flow. He's followed by a small film crew that records him lip-synching to songs from *Let It Come Down*. Mr. Spaceman passes two veteran vulcanologists from Hamburg, Germany, who've set up their equipment as close to the lava flow as they deem safe. Curious to learn what kind of fool would take such risks, the vulcanologists fol-

low the film crew. They're thrilled to learn the man in the furnace suit is Jason Pierce. It turns out they're Spiritualized fans. As far as anyone can tell, this is the first time a rock star signs autographs on the side of a volcano.

Philadelphia, Sept. 10, 2001, 11 P.M.

I'm packing for our trip to London to interview Spiritualized tomorrow. I hold in my hands a ticket for a flight from Philadelphia International Airport to Logan International Airport in Boston, where I'll catch an American Airlines flight to London.

New York City, Sept. 11, 2001, 9:15 A.M.

Centuries are big, lumbering things that rarely start or end on time. Often, it takes some cataclysmic event to shoo them away and make room for the next one. On this day, the 20th century officially ends. And I'm not going anywhere.

Logan International Airport, Boston, Sept. 25, 2001

I have a new plan: catch up with Spiritualized on tour in Ireland. Airport security asks me to remove my shoes so they can be x-rayed. I can't help but think they're two weeks too late.

The Gresham Hotel, Dublin, Ireland, Sept. 26, 2001

If it weren't for the lighter, Jason Pierce would be lighting the next cigarette off the last. And there's always a next cigarette. Dressed in bone-white leather trousers and a very spaceman-ish pair of silver sneakers, his triangle of a face framed by a mottled, Jagger-esque mop, Pierce looks hale and healthy in that sort of pale, just-stepped-out-of-the-rain way the British have about them. He no longer has the dark, raccoon-like circles that have shown up under his eyes in photos in recent years. His speaking voice is just above a whisper, with only the vaguest hint of a British accent. "Fantastic" is his superlative of choice, and he uses it liberally, placing special emphasis on the middle syllable. He comes across as sharp, focused and preternaturally calm—the same attributes that enable him to spend a solid year searching for the sweet spot on the mixing faders.

I tell him I've come to praise him, not to bury him. "To be honest, it makes no difference to me," he says. Pierce is one of the few people I actually believe means it when they say things like this. Pierce has exactly 30 minutes before he has to head over to the Ambassador Theatre for soundcheck. In this time, we learn a few basic facts: He was born 35 years ago in Rugby. His father "wasn't around," so his mother was forced to raise Pierce and his two brothers on government assistance checks. Somehow, his mother scraped together enough money to buy him an acoustic guitar when he was seven years old. He vowed to honor her sacrifice by mastering the instrument. Twenty-eight years later, it remains a work in progress. "To be honest, I don't even play that well now," he says through a plume of cigarette smoke. "There are only four or five chords I can play." Which is three or four chords more than he ever needed in Spacemen 3.

The Ambassador Theatre, Dublin, 9 P.M.

It's a sold-out show and expectations are high. *Let It Come Down* holds the number-one slot on the Irish album charts. There are reviewers on hand from the *NME*, *London Times* and *Irish Independent*. This is only the third time Pierce has publicly performed with his new live unit, a 13-piece outfit that includes a full brass section. The only holdovers from the previous lineup are keyboardist Thighpaulsandra and saxophonist Ray Dickaty. Pierce elects to open with the narco-blues of "Cop Shoot Cop." The song starts as a slow Big Easy crawl—voodoo tambourine, swampadelic piano, watery guitar—wriggling sensually like a catfish in the mud. The bar is crowded and noisy. The Guinness is starting to kick in. Suddenly, the band hits the first towering crescendo, and everyone's knees buckle slightly as the room rises eight miles high. The air thins and oxygen masks fall down from the ceiling. Ladies and gentlemen, we are once again floating in space. Hallelujah. Amen. Over and out.

Somewhere In The Middle Of Ireland, Sept. 27, 2001

Last night, the Troubles started again. While Spiritualized was negotiating ecstatic peace in Dublin, there was a war going on in Belfast. That's 104 miles away, according to my rental-car map. On a global scale, that's just up the street. Like all wars in the 21st century, I'm fast learning, Ireland's war is vague and mean and largely invisible. It only becomes visible in brief flashes of violence and brutality. Shit gets broken. People die. Nothing changes except the particulars of the shit that gets broken and the people who die. Up until recently, that was an average of 100 people a year in Northern Ireland.

A few hours earlier in Belfast, rioters pelted paramilitary police with 186 petrol bombs. Gunfire was exchanged. As I drive north to Derry (about 70 miles away from Belfast), where Spiritualized is scheduled to perform tonight, I stop for gas and pick up a newspaper. The front page has a photo of children winding their way through the burned-out hulks of overturned cars on their way to school. As I proceed north through tiny villages, there are other signs that the Troubles have renewed. At one point, I pass through a military checkpoint, where soldiers stop me and ask the nature of my business. Later, while passing through the lilliputian village of Omagh, I notice British paramilitary officers fanning out along the street and taking cover in the doorways of shops, rifles drawn. Schoolgirls file by in a nervous swoosh of white kneesocks and plaid skirts.

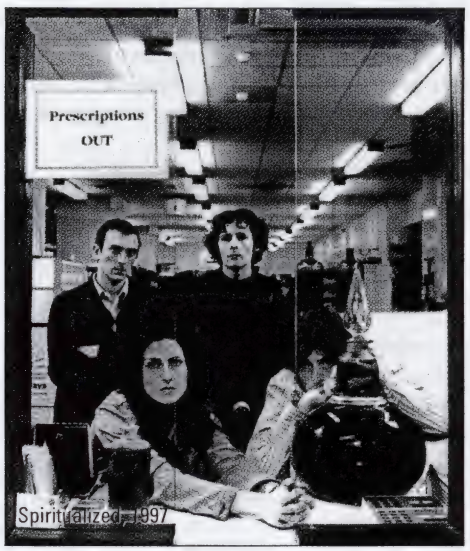
Derry, Northern Ireland, Sept. 27, 2001, 5:03 P.M.

Upon arriving in Derry, I immediately manage to get completely lost, ending up on the very spot where the Bloody Sunday massacre occurred. Grim, two-story murals mark the occasion on the sides of buildings. Spiritualized is playing in a tiny club called the Nerve Centre. I make my way up to the dressing room, where the band sits around a giant conference table laid out with beer and cold cuts. This is Pierce's first time in Derry. "It's amazing to be here after seeing this place on the news every night for 30 years," he says. From the open window comes the crackle of what sounds like gunfire echoing across the town. The room falls silent. This is life during wartime. You are always thinking about the unthinkable, and you have no choice other than to accept what was once unacceptable.

The Nerve Centre, Derry, 9:20 P.M.

Club dates by bands like Spiritualized are rarer than sunshine in Derry, as most British bands fear to tread in Northern Ireland. Needless to say, tonight's show is a sellout. Even in this room with a less-than-state-of-the-art sound system—it feels more like a high-school auditorium than a rock club—Spiritualized sounds beatific.

Three or four songs into their set, Pierce and Co. have the crowd in rapture. They hoist their pint glasses in the air and sing along with every word like it's "Auld Lang Syne" over and over again. By the time the band launches into the amphetamine zoom of "Take Me To The Other Side," a song Pierce wrote back in his Spacemen 3 days, the crowd is jumping up and down in unison until the floor buckles. It's like standing on a hardwood trampoline. Spiritualized closes with "Lord Can You Hear Me," another old Spacemen 3 song, which Pierce re-recorded for *Let It Come Down* as a full-blown gospel number. The song has been singled out by critics for being somehow insincere or inauthentic because Pierce isn't a religious man. But in much the same way adults write all the best children's songs, all good art draws its power from the ability to pretend persuasively. The song is positively massive, glorious and righteous in that your-arms-are-too-short-to-box-with-God sort of way. It's one for the hymnals, and tonight it sounds like a benediction.



Spiritualized, 1997

As Pierce leaves the stage and heads for the dressing room, he's pulled aside by a farmer who tells him he plays *Ladies And Gentlemen* to get his sheep to come to him. "I've tried other music, but they won't have it," he says. They say good music will always find its audience. Sometimes, it's on the side of a volcano; sometimes, it's in the middle of an Irish pasture. Or a war.

Backstage, The Nerve Centre, 11:20 P.M.

Everything Jason Pierce touches turns to drugs. Everything. Spiritualized's music is all about sound as drugs and drugs as lyrics. All the songs star Pierce's alter ego: Little J., the fucked-up boy who numbed the pain but killed the joy, who sometimes has his breakfast right off of a mirror and sometimes right out of the bottle. "Just me and my spike in my arm and my spoon" is his idea of "love in the middle of an afternoon." In case all this wasn't obvious enough for you, the artwork for *Ladies And Gentlemen* was designed to look like pharmaceutical packaging. In publicity photos for the album, the group stood behind the counter of a drugstore, as if waiting to fill your prescription. He's even named his one-year-old daughter Poppy. When Pierce talks about putting on "the highest shows on Earth," he means it literally. The World Trade Center. Toronto's CN Tower. His dream is to play in Bastfjord, Norway, nearly 200 miles above the Arctic Circle, which is latitudinally one of the highest inhabited places on Earth. "There is a whaling station up there, so it's not impossible," he says. "We are trying to make it work." If all goes according to plan, the Aurora Borealis will provide the light show.

The Lupine Howl guys have been telling anyone who'd listen that Pierce was deeply immersed in heroin around the time of *Ladies And Gentlemen*, but the only drugs I see him take in the time I spend with him are a few beers and a couple cartons of cigarettes. On first listen, *Let It Come Down* sounds like a rehab album. There are songs called "The 12 Steps" and "The Straight And Narrow," not to mention the album title itself. But Pierce insists *Let It Come Down* isn't a confessional: There was no rehab, no evangelical embrace of sobriety. And even if there was, it would be tacky to make hay of it in the press.

Upon closer inspection, "The 12 Steps" reveals itself to be a condemnation of rehab albums, a backhanded slap at celebrities who use their redemption as a hook for hawking whatever product they're endorsing. Besides, Pierce is tired of talking about drugs. "It comes across as a boast when you talk about it," he says. "Besides, it's not as if it isn't apparent in the music. At any rate, it's my personal life, and it's not for public display." He will confirm that, yes, he has done drugs, but he says he never had a drug problem. And yes, the drugs still work when you do them right. "The smart guy is the one who can drink half a glass of cider and get absolutely out of his mind," he says.

Whenever cops or customs officials ask what kind of music he makes, Pierce always tells them Spiritualized is a gospel group, which is only a slight stretching of the truth. There's a blurry line between gospel and space rock—both want to take you higher—and Pierce has made it his mission to erase the line between the two. As far back as *Pure Phase*, Pierce has been incorporating the elation triggers of gospel—angelic choirs, soaring organs, towering horns—into his arrangements. But Pierce isn't a believer. He's borrowed the medium, but he's not buying the message. Remember, music, not religion, is the opiate of the masses.

MAGNET: So you don't believe in God?

Pierce: I'm very empirical, and I like my science to be good science.

Do you believe in the soul?

Not (one) that transcends the body when you die.

You think that when we die, we just cease to exist, we become worm food?

Yeah.

How can you be so rational, especially as someone who's spent his life making music about achieving these sorts of heightened states? It's all about irrational things.

'Cause they are achievable. If I say I believe that music can make you feel fantastic or make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, I know that's true because I have experienced that. But if I say music is the key to a fantastic afterlife, that's a kind of belief. That's like saying I believe that pigs can fly. When you start a sentence with "I believe," you get into the realm of fantasy.

So you believe these states of elation and ecstatic consciousness you can experience with music or drugs are all just chemical reactions in your brain and not intimations of divinity?

Yes.

That's rather depressing, I think.

No, it's not—it's really exciting. The more you understand things, it doesn't make them more depressing. Understanding how things work doesn't take the excitement out of things.

When you deny the possibility of divine mysteries and reduce everything to a series of molecules bumping into each other randomly that triggers some kind of reaction, that to me just makes the miracle of life and creation seem small and colorless and devoid of poetry.

(continued on page 123)

SPIRITUALIZED

(continued from page 72)

But it has been anyway, whether you like it or not.

I agree science has done a remarkable job of figuring out how most everything works, but how did it all begin and where did it come from? All this just happened by chance?

Let it come down, let it come down.

Philadelphia, Oct. 24, 2001

Spiritualized is playing at the Trocadero, an old vaudeville/burlesque theater turned rock club, located in the city's Chinatown section. Across the street from the Trocadero is the Greyhound bus station, where just the other day the police found enough C-4 plastic explosives in an abandoned locker to reduce the entire block to rubble. The bus station is only a few blocks from where I live. I can't help but think of that old Spacemen 3 gig poster, only now it says, "Are Your Nightmares 3 Sizes Too Big?"

It's starting to get to me. Every other minute, I think, "The terrorists have come up with the smartest bomb there is: fear." They built it in a cave in Afghanistan, and they've been dropping it on our heads every day since September 11. They killed 5,000 people in one hour. They are here, and we can't even see them. Sometimes, we think we see them, but we can never be sure. They look and dress like so many other innocent people who live, work, study or visit here. They use our Constitution as camouflage. They walk among us and between us. They use us as human shields. Our armies are useless in this kind of war—they only know how to shoot and kill things, and you can't shoot anthrax—but we send the troops to Afghanistan and beyond. But the war is here, where the enemy has slipped through our mail slots into our homes to kill us. William S. Burroughs was right: A paranoid-schizophrenic is a guy who just found out what's going on.

Then I think, "Maybe popular music will get better because of this." Maybe this whole fuckin' mess will act like a giant pop-culture enema and just blow all the shit that's been clogging up things for the last few years. Maybe people will want something more than jailbait T&A and backward-baseball-cap attitude. Surely, people will be hungry for something a little deeper, something a little more *spiritualized* than Britney or Christina. I mean, what does Fred Durst or J.Lo or the artist formerly known as Puff Daddy have to do with anything that's happening right now and in the foreseeable future? When seven-month-old babies have anthrax, who's gonna be impressed by Eminem's uncanny ability to somehow make "faggot" rhyme with "suck my dick"? After September 11, all that seems so last century, so petty and shallow and mean. Maybe, just maybe, millions of people will want to hear a song like "Lord Can You Hear Me."

I tell this to Pierce shortly before he goes onstage. I don't expect him to buy it. It's the kind of thing he would usually shrug off; it's too simple, too cute, too much of a Hollywood ending. It's like journalists saying *Ladies And Gentlemen* was his breakup record and *Let It Come Down* is his rehab record.

This is the last of our interview sessions, and Pierce has been resisting all my attempts to tie his story into a neat little package with a pretty bow on top. He simply won't participate in the making of his own myth, and even though this is rendering my job nearly impossible, I have to respect him for it.

By this point, I've almost finished this article: It's this travelogue told in dated journal entries, and it's kind of about war and peace and God and drugs. All I need is for Pierce to kindly step into this story, which I don't think is too much to ask because it isn't too far from the truth. But he steps out of every circle I try to draw around him with my questions. It's not like he's being a jerk or anything. He's just not going to talk about drugs. He's not going to talk about his personal life. He's not going to give me pithy little soundbytes. He's not going to comment on the World Trade Center attacks, even though he understands why I would ask him to. It's just that, you know, it would be shameless and exploitative for him to do so.

I've run out of questions, but the tape recorder is still rolling, so I tell Pierce my theory about how what happened on September 11 and everything after may well change popular music for the better. That maybe the time has finally come for a band like Spiritualized. He smiles and takes a long puff on the latest in a chain of Marlboro Lights. Then he looks down at my tape recorder. "I can't comment on that, but you're the second person that has said that to me," he says, exhaling. "The first was Dr. John."

Ladies and gentlemen, let the war on bad music begin. **M**

VANITY FAIR

October 2001

FANFAIR

The Spaceman Cometh

SPIRITUALIZED KEEPS FLOATING WITH *LET IT COME DOWN*

On its bewitching 1997 album, *Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space,* England's Spiritualized looked like a band in thrall to the chemical proclivities of *auteur*-leader **Jason Pierce.** "There's a hole in my arm where all the money goes," crooned Pierce on one track. In case anyone missed the lyrical hints, the CD's packaging was designed to resemble that of a generic pharmaceutical–down to the silver-foil bubble pack.

At first glance, *Let It Come Down,* the long-gestated follow-up to *Ladies and Gentleman . . . ,* suggests a painful crash landing for the pale-voiced singer. With titles such as "The Twelve Steps" and "Won't Get to Heaven (The State I'm In)," there were critics who immediately speculated that the 36-year-old Pierce had abandoned decadence for the straight and narrow-minded. "My only retort to that is to say, 'No, no, no, I'm still doing drugs–I'm high now!'" says Pierce, who correctly points out that any half-attentive listener would realize that he's only playing around with the idea of sobriety and redemption.

On *Let It Come Down,* the core of the previous Spiritualized lineup has been replaced with a battalion of helpers that includes a gospel choir and dozens of classical musicians. Pierce wrote the string arrangements himself in an effort not to "tread water" and to meet his self-imposed criteria: "As long as it satisfies me, and I've aimed sufficiently high and gone after something that's not easily attainable, I'm happy." In our age of cozy consensus, let us raise a glass to one rocker who is still unrepentantly high on ego.

—STEVEN DALY

HIGH LIFE
Jason Pierce of Spiritualized touches down in New York.

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP, BY SACHA WALDMAN; BOTTOM, BY BRIAN DOBEN; FOR DETAILS, SEE CREDITS PAGE

music

SPIRITUALIZED

written by ***Jessica Hundley*** *photographed by* ***Chris Buck***

Jason Pierce is not who you think he is. The man behind two of the best bands of the last few decades (Spaceman 3 and Spiritualized), Pierce has made the vast instrumental epic his specialty. His songs are nearly always sweeping, melodic journeys, dreamily plaintive ballads which begin with clean simplicity then move gracefully into warm and climatic waves of sound.

Pierce's sense of musical drama, coupled with his lyrics—carefully chosen wordplay which rarely shies away from big emotion—has earned him a reputation as a kind of melancholic introvert, another in a long line of sensitive English gents who find their solace in song. But this assumption is far too simple.

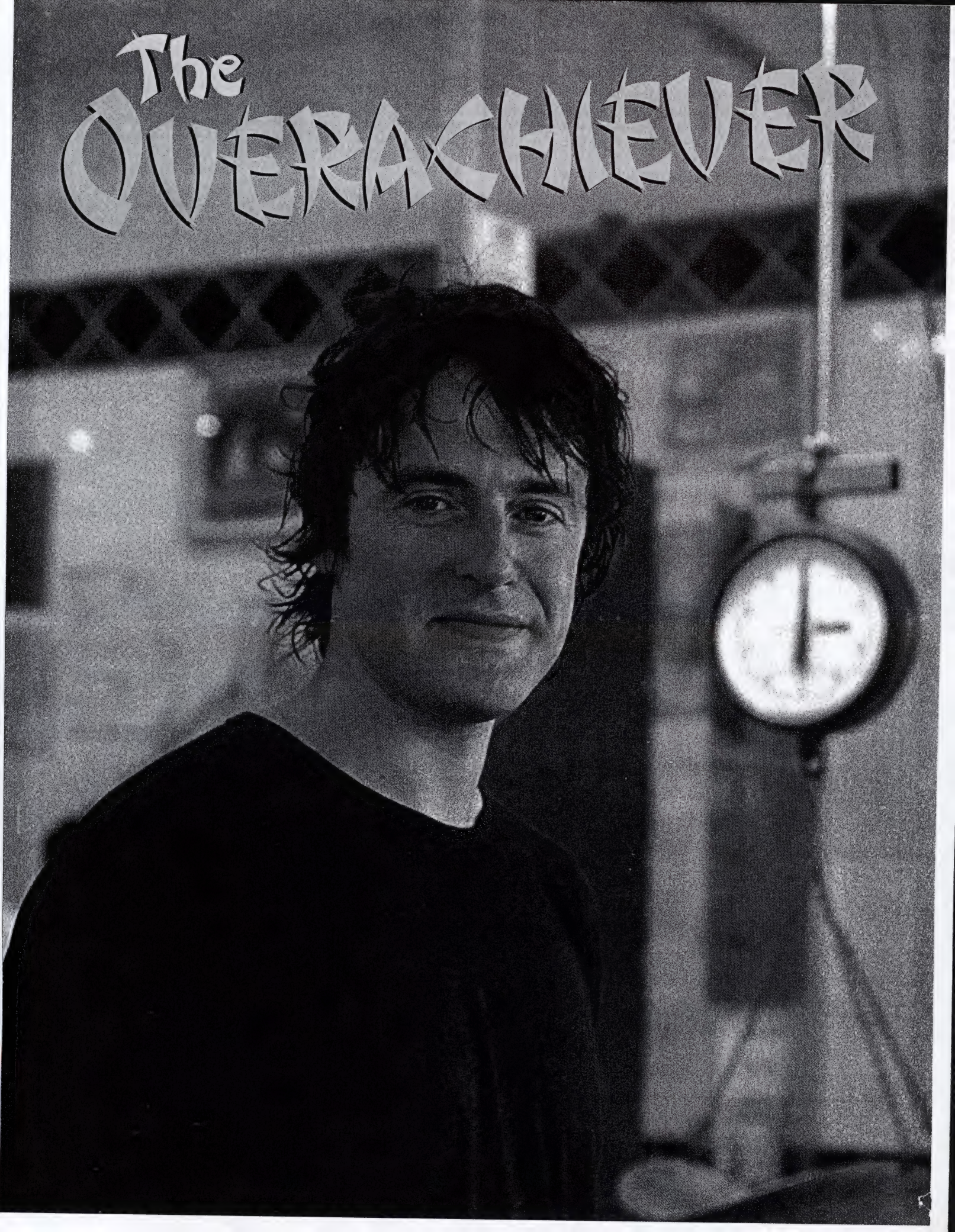
In a dark Soho bar, about to uncork a second bottle of a particularly fine Merlot, Pierce is determined to set the record straight. Even before he begins his explanation, a hint of a grin in his eyes and an openness to his face already negates any trace of the tortured artist he is purported to be. "I'm passionate about what I do, but I write with humor," claims Pierce, taking a slow, satisfied sip from his glass. "I have no interest in hopeless poetics. It's not so much about baring your soul, as finding the right words to convey a universal feeling. The thing about emotion is that it's very reactive. You can't reason when you're immersed in it. To write a song you have to be objective. I don't sit in the studio completely overwhelmed. And people have not picked up on that. They think that I'm slitting my wrists and that it's all about redemption and living on the edge. But it's a story. It's like someone like Lee Hazelwood who can sing those lines about love because he's been there, but it's not necessarily who he is at the moment."

The beauty of Spiritualized is that this lyrical objectivity does not necessarily negate Pierce's sincerity. And while he may be amusing himself, the humor he uses contains none of the ironic distance which might cause his words to lose their resonance. "All the music I love has something in common in that you can genuinely believe it's coming from inside the person who is writing or singing it," continues Pierce. "You can say, that person believes in that, they truly believe, even if they're performing another person's work. It's not so much about the sort of music it is, as much as it is about the belief in what that music is expressing."

Pierce has found this belief in everything from folk to jazz to gospel to classical; and the music he has made reflects his wide-spread embrace of genres. Spiritualized's newest release *Let it Come Down* (which has arrived after a five-year wait and much needed band member reorganizing), is no exception. Meticulously produced, the album's distinctive sound is a continuation of Pierce's love affair with combining simplicity in structure with unexpected arrangements and instrumentation.

"When I started to write the songs, I wanted the orchestrations to be integral," explains Pierce, "to arrange, say, the French horns before even the bass or the drums were written. With most pop music, the orchestrations are done after the event, they're not necessarily integral. I thought that if I attempted to eliminate everything I knew that was relevant to Spiritualized in the past—the tremolos, the phasers, the stuff that makes it easy to say this music is otherworldly, then I would have something. Music can achieve that otherworldliness without those things. Look at Patsy Kline, look at Billie Holiday, look at gospel or doo wop."

For Spiritualized fans, *Let it Come Down* may at first glance appear all too recognizable, but ultimately the band's long-awaited return will seem a logical evolution. Spiritualized's music has always contained a kind of immediate nostalgia, and it is Pierce's unique gift to maintain familiarity while simultaneously exploring wholly uncharted terrain. "Looking inside yourself, testing yourself, is what makes a record important, what makes it exciting," says Pierce, finishing his glass. "This album took a very long time, and I don't know how you know when it's truly finished. I guess it's when you reach that point where you think this is as good as it gets. Every time I've finished a record and I've sat here talking about it, I've said, 'This is as good as it gets right now.' But I could never say, 'This is it, I got it right this time,' and negate the last albums. I learn different things each time. I got it right last time and the time before that. You just want everything to be the best it can be and you want to be moving forward. It's not just about having 11 songs. It's about making a record that people can find 20 years from now and love. I want to make music so that people can discover it in the same way that I've discovered records, discover it and say, 'God, this is really beautiful, this is great stuff.' If I can do that, then I'm happy."


The
OVERACHIEVER

MERCURY REV | SPARKLEHORSE | SUPERCHUNK | ARCO | GORILLAZ | AFI

Devil in the Woods

DIW

DISPLAY UNTIL
JANUARY 2002
ISSUE 6.3 $3

INDEPENDENT THOUGHT ON INDEPENDENT MUSIC

MAKE IT BIG

Spiritualized's Jason Pierce Leads A Cast Of 100 On *Let It Come Down*

08>
0 74470 94084 5

How do you follow up the most critically acclaimed album of your career? If you're JASON PIERCE, you fire your entire band, spend a year and a half making an album with 100 hired guns and keep your major label in the dark during the recording process. Isaac Josephson caught up with SPIRITUALIZED's leader in New York City and spoke with the headstrong Englishman about men who float in space, cashing checks signed by Volkswagen and coming down from the monstrous task of making *Let It Come Down*. Photos by Traci Hoard.

When I spoke with Jason Pierce on his previous American tour, he chain-smoked French cigarettes and rambled on about the sonic palette of the French horn. He lectured elaborately about a symphony for bass instruments that he'd already written, only to later admit that it was all in his head. And he twisted questions regarding his career into an invitation to detail the ways his creative urges had been thwarted by circumstance, politics and greed.

Jason Pierce is a contentious *artiste*.

Jason Pierce is also a record label's worst nightmare—the musician who fires his band and fends off execs while holing up in the studio for 18 months with 100 musicians and a half-baked idea of creating transcendent music. And Jason Pierce is a rock star who makes more drug references than a pharmacist, then dismisses them all as allegory.

Jason Pierce is all of these things. On this sunny Manhattan afternoon in early June, he is also quite amicable. After all, he's been blissfully out of the public eye for two years. He's also just come off a month's holiday, the details to which he will only allude with an almost guilty, adolescent grin and an evasive shrug. Private life is a taboo subject of Pierce's, whose alleged love woes were unfortunately plastered all over the British music press four years ago when bandmate and one-time girlfriend, Kate Radley, ran off with Richard Ashcroft of The Verve.

Personal questions aside, as we stroll through Chinatown sampling frothy tapioca drinks and dodging four-foot grandmothers who elbow past us to lasso live crabs from the street-side bins, the Spiritualized founder and sole permanent member is as relaxed and chatty as I've seen him.

This is the beginning of a three-day press barrage for Pierce. He's in from Rugby, England, to promote his follow-up to the critically acclaimed *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space*, the lush and daringly dissonant headphone symphony that earned *NME's* 1997 Album Of The Year, beating out wildly popular releases by such British music titans as Radiohead, The Verve and Oasis.

Four years between albums is an eternity for a band under a major-label contract, especially one like Spiritualized, which generated so much hoopla with their last release. True to form, however, Pierce either didn't tolerate, or was simply oblivious to, industry pressures, and when he finally emerged with *Let It Come Down* this past spring, he says that BMG/Arista didn't even ask to hear the record before it slotted it for release.

"I think it's because they know what kind of artist I am," he explains, matter-of-factly. "They know that I'm going to take my time and get the music right. And when it's done, and I say it's done, it's as good as it's going to be.

"Occasionally, someone would come around asking after the album's progress," recalls Pierce. "My standard line was always, 'Nearly.'"

He pauses, lights a cigarette, and glances back up.

"I'd say, 'It's nearly there.'"

And as he delivers the standard line with a dispassionate stare that would unnerve even the most seasoned poker player, I can see how Pierce manages his relationship with inquisitive label contacts.

Since his early days with college-radio icons Spacemen 3, this iron-willed certainty has carried Pierce past petty industry convention, both artistic and corporate. And it's the music this certainty compels him to craft that keeps us coming back like lapdogs, despite all of his contentions and pretensions.

At its core, the music of Spacemen 3 and Spiritualized is adventurous, compelling and intense as all get-out. Pierce crafts standard-issue rock songs using sonics (brass, woodwinds, strings) and concepts (fundamentals of free jazz, gospel, classical) that are wholly out of step with the rock realm. Aside from the occasional headache when slipping into self-indulgence (witness *Ladies And Gentlemen's* "No God Only Religion," which careens through four minutes of Peter Brötzmann-inspired dissonance that can only be the soundtrack to Hell), the net result is a sound built on contrasts. Spiritualized and Spacemen 3 albums are subtle like the interlocking melodies of a Bach piece and bombastic like an Oasis single. They're as delicate as a lullaby and as raw as a Velvet Underground jam. And the efforts are sneering and mournful, humble and grandiose. What's more, Pierce crafts such a mixed bag of emotions without sacrificing cohesion and energy for quasi-academic notions of composition. It's still rock 'n' roll.

"Occasionally, someone [from the label] would come around asking after the album's progress. My standard line was always, 'Nearly.'"

Pierce's musical beginnings were very rock 'n' roll, too. Like most teenagers in the early '80s armed with a six-string and ill-conceived ideas of style, the singer picked up The Stooges' *Raw Power* and decided he wanted to be Iggy Pop.

"What brought me to rock 'n' roll was simply the silver pants and the wild look," Pierce explains in a moment of clarity that demands another cigarette, domestic brand instead of last tour's imports. Perhaps it's a sign that he's become more down-to-earth.

"Even before I heard the music, I was so into the image [on the *Raw Power* cover] of this guy and the audience."

There was no music scene in Rugby in 1983 for silver-pantsed Stooges clones or otherwise, so Pierce and his friends started The Reverberation Club in the back room of a local bar. It was in this smoky locale that Spacemen 3 played their earliest gigs.

"At first, it was pretty much just a good time," he remembers. "We had this one event we called 'The Mushroom Party,' where we filled the room with dry ice and did the free-form thing, let everyone, from surrounding towns come, bring their own instruments and play random things."

When I suggest the heady phrase "group improvisation" as a moniker for the party's musical goings-on, Pierce attempts to assent with a straight face for a mere second before it disintegrates into a chuckle. "You could call it that," he says, grinning yet again.

Soon after Spacemen 3 formed, Pierce realized he wasn't "the Iggy Pop type," that what interested him was the music itself and the prospect of pushing The Stooges' primitive aesthetic into uncharted territory. The band still embraced the power inherent in the two-chord style, but gradually layered in gorgeous harmonies while altering the music's tempo and refining the accents for added grandeur.

"Once we really got going, Spacemen 3 wasn't about the image," Pierce says. "It was about creating music that was intense as humanly possible. Although it was based in the sound of The Cramps and The Stooges, we tried to play those parts like they'd never been played before."

Beauty *and* intensity in music? It went, to say the least, against the grain for 1983, a year that straddled the ages of punk and new wave, two genres that possessed the frenetic energy yet lacked the musical depth Spacemen 3 aimed to explore.

Pierce and his bandmate, Pete Kember (aka Sonic Boom), operated like good cop/bad cop. Kember handled the tension with his hankering for minimalist, one-chord drones, while Pierce injected the music with delicate melodies and beautifully aching harmonies. Critics dubbed it "trance rock," for lack of a better term. The dichotomy eventually tore them apart in a breakup highlighted by public vitriol (seemingly a pattern for Pierce), but not before they produced some of the most groundbreaking music of the decade.

Pierce's favorite Spacemen 3 record, *Perfect Prescription*, is mine, too. Released in 1987, it represents a time when the two bandmates had just started moving in their opposing directions, and the styles tempered one another rather than clashed.

"It was only our second album, but we never went anywhere near it again," admits Pierce, with the day's first hint of frustration in his voice. "I'm happy with the rest of our records as they stand." He pauses for a practiced, indecipherable smile, adding, "Maybe."

"It wasn't until I formed Spiritualized, though, that I realized you could make a record that was whole, that was 100-percent realized potential."

Pierce has stated many times that he started Spiritualized primarily as a live band. Now it sounds as if he was after something that would allow him the freedom to pursue his studio goals first and foremost. It's a contradiction he shrugs off this afternoon, and maybe it's irrelevant.

"With the studio album, Spiritualized creates something that's as finished as it's ever going to be," Pierce explains. "It can and should be perfect for what it is. Live, Spiritualized grows that music, makes it even more intense and makes the emotive parts more emotive."

Spiritualized's debut record, 1992's *Laser Guided Melodies*, was the perfect culmination of Pierce's Spacemen 3-era penchant for seamless, ethereal constructs. Free of Kember's monotonous anti-melodies, the album's woozy synthesizers and gently mixed vocals hover like a weightless, psychedelic dream.

On the band's second release, Pierce reintroduced raw underpinnings, but on his own terms. 1995's *Pure Phase* employed a bit of that garage-psychedelic guitar sound Spacemen 3 copped from '60s cult bands The Red Krayola and 13th Floor Elevators, but relied on gospel choirs and horns to produce tension and release.

By the time *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* was released two years later, that tension and release had graduated to mountainous peaks of exaltation and post-cathartic pits of despair, like the deadened feeling of emptiness where emotion used to lie. Similar to what's left after a good cry. Pierce reached down deep for *Ladies And Gentlemen*, enlisting the help of 58 musicians—strings and saxophones, choirs and blues-inflected guitar/piano combinations. Together they traversed the landscape between free jazz and tightly composed linear arrangements.

Ladies And Gentlemen's scope was unlike anything else of its time, and the record deserved all the critical praise it received. Unfortunately, its commercial performance paled in comparison, and Pierce quickly exhausted what little revenue existed in an elaborate attempt to blow the songs out live. Many musicians and countless shows later, the band's coffers were empty, and when Volkswagen approached Pierce with an offer to use the title track in a television commercial, he didn't think twice.

"We needed the money to carry on our tour," he explains. "Plus, I needed to pick up some money to start making the next record. The label was doling out whatever they doled out, and it wasn't nearly enough.

"Volkswagen didn't mess with the music, though. I made conditions. I told them they could use it as long as there was no

talk-over. It was actually pretty nicely done, don't you think?" Pierce raises his eyebrows and crushes out a smoke.

"It probably helped me sell a few more records, anyway."

I joke that I'm surprised by this rare bout of pragmatism, and he dismisses it with a wave of the hand.

"It's all about advertising these days, anyway, and I don't take any of it seriously. Take MTV. There isn't any other scenario where people sit down and watch hours of adverts. And those ones aren't even good adverts."

Like the Volkswagen commercial?

"Like the Volkswagen commercial," he agrees with a laugh. "They do have good taste in music don't they?"

Bolstered by the Volkswagen funds, Spiritualized continued their world tour midway through 1999. Then, in his most publicly acrimonious squabble to date, Pierce sacked the entire band—drummer Damon Reece, multi-instrumentalist Sean Cook and guitarist Mike Mooney.

Spiritualized had been shedding members since their inception. Guitarist Mark Refoy, bassist Willie Curruthers and drummer Jon Mattock, holdovers from the Spacemen 3 days, were weeded out by the time *Pure Phase* hit the streets. Both the press and public had a field day with Kate Radley's departure for the greener, ostensibly more sane pastures of Ashcroft's music and embrace. This was the first time, however, that the band was wholly Pierce's, and his former mates predictably painted him as the temperamental, irrational autocrat. With Pierce's history, that certainly wasn't difficult, but the disgruntled ex-Spiritualized musicians milked it for more than it was worth. The trio formed a new band, Lupine Howl, more on the back of the controversy than any notion of music. Today, the group's official bio still opens with the fact that its members were canned from Pierce's band.

The Cast

A list of everyone who played on *Let It Come Down*:

Spaceman: Fender Thinline, Fender Jaguar, Epiphone Olympic, Vox Starstreamer XII, Martin acoustic, banjo, Vox Continental, Farfisa compact, piano, harmonica, vocals
Thighpaulsandra: Hammond C3, Vox Continental, Farfisa Compact, VK7, Kurzweil K2000, Minimoog, Fender Rhodes, piano
Doggen Foster: Gibson Les Paul Gold Top, Gibson Les Paul Custom, Fender Telecaster, Vox Bulldog, Martin acoustic, harmonica
John Coxon: Fender Telecaster, Fender Jaguar, Gibson Firebird, Vox Continental, Farfisa Compact, piano, Juno 106, Martin acoustic
Martin Schellard: Fender jazz bass, Fender Musicmaster, Fender Bass VI, Burns bass, Fender Telecaster, banjo, piano
Tom Edwards: vibraphone, marimba, timpani, tubular bells, percussion
Kevin Bales: Gretsch drum kit
Raymond Dickaty: soprano and baritone saxophone
Pete Whyman: saxophones, clarinet
Mimi Parker: vocals
Chris Clark: piano
David O'Carroll: tuba
Ben Edwards: trumpet
Nick Smart: trumpet
James Adams: trombone
Tamar Osborn: saxophone, clarinet
David Temple: saxophone, clarinet

1st Violins: Edmund Coxon (leader), Cathy Thompson, Jackie Shave, Everton Nelson, Patrick Kiernan, Steve Morris, Ian Humphries, Christina Emanuel, Laura Malhuish
2nd Violins: Jonathan Rees, Dai Emanuel, Sonia Slaney, Perry Montague-Mason, Miffy Hirsch, Jeremy Morris, Ann Morfee
Viola: Roger Chase, Philip Dukes, Bruce White, Kate Musker
Cello: David Daniels, Tony Pleeth, Cathy Giles, Jonathan Tunnell
Double Bass: Mary Scully, Diane Clarke
Cor Anglais: Jane Marshall
Bassoon: Gavin McNaughton, Celia Birkenshaw
French horn: Hugh Seenan, Richard Bissel, Nigel Black, Paul Gardham, Dave Lee, Martin Owen, Richard Ashton, Michaela Betts
Trumpet: Andy Crowley, Ian Balmain, Bob Farley, Paul Archibald, Paul Beniston
Trombone: Graham Lee, Colin Sheen, Peter Davies, Mike Hext, Roger Brenner
Bass trombone: Dave Stewart, Roger Argente, Andy Waddicor
Flute/alto flute & bass flute: Dave Heath, Andy Findon
Contra-bass flute: Andy Findon
Oboe: Chris Cowie, Margaret Tindale
Clarinet: Anthony Pike, Richard Addison
Bass Clarinet: David Fuest
Harp: Helen Tunstall

Nigel Short: countertenor
Emer McParland: alto
Sarah Eyden: soprano
Simon Grant: bass
Andrew Busher: tenor
Michael Dore: bass
Heather Cairncross: alto
Andrew Gray: tenor
Jacqueline Barron: soprano
Rachel Weston: alto
Gerard O'Beirne: tenor

London Community Gospel Choir: Wendi Rose, Wayne Hernandez, Jenny Graham, Donovan Keith Lawrence, Vernetta Meade, Jenny La Touche, Aaron Paul Sokell, Travis Jae Cole, Vimbai Shire, Samantha Smith, Irene Forrester, Carmen Smart, Michelle John-Douglas, Jasette Barratt Choir Director: Daniel Thomas

Although Pierce shows no regret over jettisoning Cook and company, he does admit that it made things considerably more difficult when returning to the studio to record *Let It Come Down*.

"Because I didn't have a core band, I had to write a lot more than I expected. I also didn't really consider that I was going to lose all that stuff that happens when you play with some people for a while, learn to live inside and outside the material and play off each other's styles. With this new record, I started more or less from scratch, and it was quite a challenge playing with new musicians."

Of course, one challenge is never enough for Pierce (he'll tell you, ad nauseam, that he's "not one to tread water"). As we begin to discuss the two-year process in making *Let It Come Down*, he proudly lists the other Herculean artistic tasks he's undertaken. Then his perfectionist streak takes over. Like an adult recalling, with amusement, his foolhardy adolescence, Pierce counts the ways the effort fell short of his expectations.

The record's overarching goal, as Pierce puts it, was "to sound like Spiritualized without using a lot of the sonics that were instantly recognizable as Spiritualized." That meant purging his music of such residual Spacemen 3 tricks as transmission bleeps and spaced-out synthesizers, yet still "retaining that feeling that it's coming from another place, another world." It was a direction that he started to take with *Ladies And Gentlemen*, but on *Let It Come Down*, Pierce aspired to an almost total acoustic sound.

"I realized you don't need to use those sounds to be otherworldly, because there's a whole lot of music that still has that quality to it. Patsy Cline sounds like she's coming from outer space. Doo-wop sounds like angels. I wanted that. I wanted no effects on this album."

"Because I didn't have a core band, I had to write a lot more than I expected. I started more or less from scratch, and it was quite a challenge playing with new musicians."

To accomplish this transition, Pierce assembled the aforementioned cast of 100 musicians. "I got the first-chair violins from the best orchestras, and the best voices from the most acclaimed gospel choirs," he boasts.

"That was my first oversight, and I feel pretty foolish about it in retrospect. I was going for a big sound like Duke Ellington or Cole Porter, who I thought used whole orchestras on their records. Afterwards, I went back and checked—this seems really elementary, I know—and there are only about 16 people on them." Pierce shakes his head when remembering how it nearly drove him mad trying to coordinate all the musicians.

Next, Pierce, who is an admitted novice when it comes to studio technique, recorded all of the instruments together in one room, believing it would sound less composed and more vibrant than if he recorded each voice in isolation.

"Of course, all of the instruments bled together. I don't know why I didn't anticipate that, but it made a lot more work for me in the mixing. It was more laborious than I ever thought."

The most difficult part in crafting *Let It Come Down*, admits Pierce, was actually scoring all the music. "I'd never done anything like that before. I don't write music. I don't even play very well, so I had to sing the notes into a tape recorder, then pick them out on the keyboard, one by one, for every instrument. We used something like 140 tracks for all of that."

And?

"And, maybe I shouldn't have had all those parts. I came out of the recording process with a really big, big-band sound. It didn't fit with the intimacy of the songs—140 tracks of acoustic sound was too bombastic. So that was many endless days of re-mixing right there. I wasn't aiming for *that* big of a big band."

Ultimately, Pierce corrected all of the mistakes he made recording *Let It Come Down*, and accomplished his ambition of taking Spiritualized acoustic. The record opens with the Dr. John-inspired piano riffs and rock swagger of "On Fire" (Pierce's next-generation version of the *Ladies And Gentlemen* song "Electricity"). From there, it shifts in that Spiritualized way from raw-boned to delicate, and back again. "Don't Just Do Something," a song on the weighty subject of thinking things through before acting, ironically floats free of a heavy backbeat. "The Twelve Steps" is all angry guitar crunch, and "I Didn't Mean to Hurt You" inches forward with the help of a simple six-note piano riff and funeral drum. "Stop Your Cryin'" is one big, cathartic sigh, the perfect acoustic version of Pierce's *Laser Guided Melodies*-era song craft.

What's missing? First of all, Pierce may have realized his goal of renovating the Spiritualized sound with different tools, but he failed to fully evolve that sound in the process. *Let It Come Down* comes off almost like an acoustic amalgamation of songs from *Laser Guided Melodies*, *Pure Phase* and *Ladies And Gentlemen*. That's certainly not a bad thing, but it's also not the leap we've come to expect from one Spiritualized album to the next. Second, *Let It Come Down*'s emotional contrast exists from song to song, but without the tried-and-true effects-and-acoustic clash, the tracks themselves lack tension and release. It's something Pierce was fearful of, and he talks about the attempt to avoid this particular pitfall.

"I used all sorts of clashing chords and weird tones in the score to try and create that contrast inside the songs. Plus, I wrote music

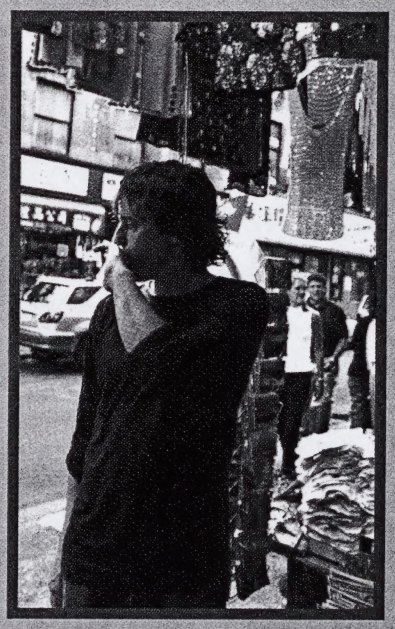
for the instruments completely on the edge of their range—kind of like this Gil Evans thing, where he's got the flutes playing the low range and the French horns playing the high range. Unfortunately, when I put it all together, those wrong chords and weird tones sort of pass you by. They don't appear nearly as jarring as I thought they would, as they looked when I wrote them. I think I have to be more extreme on the next album."

"I was going for a big sound like Duke Ellington or Cole Porter, who I thought used whole orchestras on their records. Afterwards, I went back and checked—this seems really elementary, I know—and there are only about 16 people on them."

From there, Pierce thinks out loud a bit about future studio adventures, but we both know better than to assign any weight so soon after the completion of *Let It Come Down*. The conversation quickly turns to Pierce's favorite topic: other music.

When some musicians are neck-deep in their own work, they shut themselves off from all outside influences. Not Pierce. The last time we spoke, he chattered, like the giddy music fan he is, about Alex Chilton, Sly Stone and electric Miles Davis. Today it's all about Patsy Cline, Sam Cooke and the modern classical/free jazz twist of pianist Matthew Shipp.

"The last show I saw was probably one of the best shows I've ever seen," he recalls, with a flicker of excitement in his eyes. "It was Matthew [Shipp] and [bassist] William Parker. It was really humbling, because I'd just put together a 100-piece band to make this record, and here were these two lonesome guys onstage doing something so sublime. I mean, it's free jazz, for Chrissakes. It's not supposed to move you in that kind of way, but I was close to tears. It was kind of weird, completely unexpected."



We compare Shipp's sound to Spiritualized's latest record, then jazz to rock music in general.

"I don't think the vocabulary of sound, the harmonics as you say, have changed in pop music since The Beatles," Pierce posits. "It's the opposite in jazz. The sound hasn't really changed, except for the electric stuff, but the harmonics, the language, has completely grown in the past 10 years."

Pierce reflects on this for a moment, then continues.

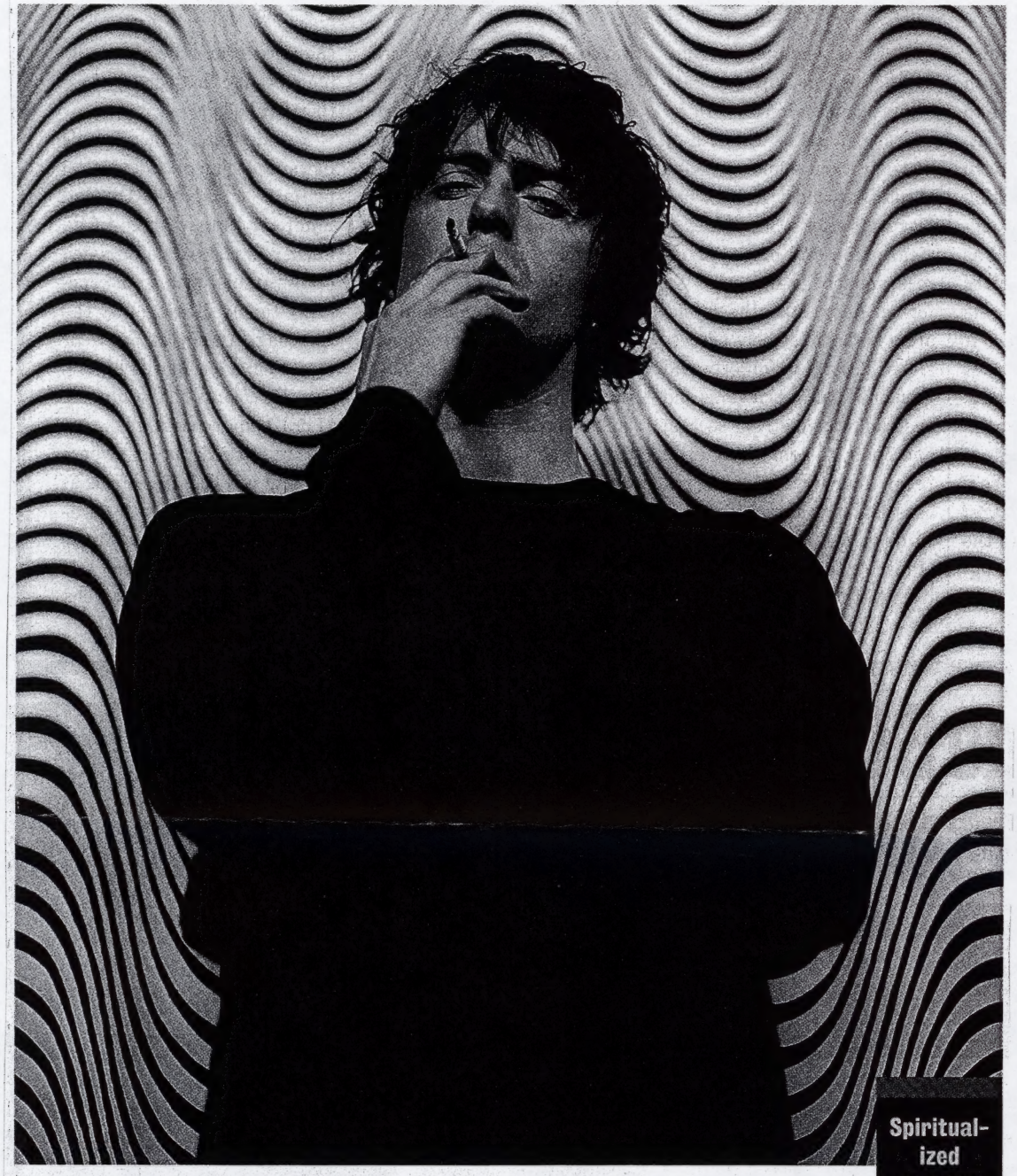
"It's weird that the pop-music vocabulary hasn't changed. It's too comfortable, too easy, to write a meaningless song that way: Drape it in fuzz tones and weird sounds, and call it a success. Lo-fi does that. It's studiously lo-fi, which is quite charming, but most of the time there's nothing there of substance."

The main problem with pop music?

"I think it's so conservative now. You only have to pretend to lean slightly to the left to be avant-garde.

"I'm the biggest pretender there is," says Pierce with a laugh. Neither one of us, however, believes it. Ψ

Entertainment Weekly



Spiritual-
ized
LET IT COME
DOWN
ARISTA

High Powered

England's other chemical brother, Jason Pierce, creates a classical rock gas on Spiritualized's new album. by David Browne

AS WE'VE ALL LEARNED lately, hope is a fleeting, elusive phenomenon: One minute it's around the bend, the next it seems hundreds of miles away. You struggle with it, reject it, return to it. Spiritualized headmaster Jason Pierce—or J Spaceman, as he prefers to call himself—appears to know this better than anyone. In interviews and on disc, he's been persistently open about his love for chemical stimulation: "Me and a spike in my arm and my spoon," he sang on the British band's 1997 creative turning point, *Ladies and gentlemen we are floating in space*, an album that also exalt-

October 5, 2001

ed the healing powers of love. (In addition, it gave the band a foothold in this country; the title cut was featured in a Volkswagen ad.)

But Pierce has never dealt with his affinity for drugs and his creeping concern about the altered state they induce as directly as he does on **Let It Come Down**, Spiritualized's fifth album. He does tend to wallow in his lifestyle: "If I am good, I could add years to my life/I would rather add some life to my years," he boasts wearily in "Out of Sight." He mocks rehab programs in the borderline-juvenile "The Twelve Steps" ("I was very nearly clean, y'know/'Cos I only had twelve steps to go"). On "The Straight and the Narrow," he's anything but: "The trouble with the straight and the narrow/Is it's so thin I keep sliding off to the side/And the devil makes good use of these hands of mine." But perhaps because he's a new parent, he also realizes his precarious situation: On "Won't Get to Heaven (The State I'm In)," he begs the Lord for "one more chance... I believe I'm damaged/I believe that I'm wrong."

Pierce's lyrics are just one of the ways in which *Let It Come Down* is a startling, and startlingly good, record. Since Spiritualized rose from the ashes of Spacemen 3 in the early '90s, their ethereal music has always stood out from that period's guitar-dominated Britpop. Their last album, 1998's erratic *Royal Albert Hall October 10 1997 Live*, was a double-disc concert album recorded with an orchestra; in a sense, you had to admire them for fearlessly attempting such an inflated, retro art-rock device. But working with a largely overhauled edition of the group, as well as nearly 100 classical musicians and choral singers, Pierce sets on even loftier goal for *Let It Come Down*, one of the most ambitious records out this year. A big, lumbering, and often uplifting symphonic-rock piece about being a wastrel, it's as if Brian Wilson had made *Pet Sounds* a decade later in the midst of his bedridden, drug-addled despondency.

Like Wilson and Phil Spector, Pierce, who plays guitars and keyboards, knows a rapturous pop melody when he hears one, and he knows how majestic it can sound with *tons* of sound around it. *Let It Come Down* aims for a blend of classical pomp and bleary-eyed rock, and for the most part, the former dominates; the tracks are a series of stately processions. They start quietly and then build, with each verse and each additional string section and choir, to something else: "Stop Your Crying," a song of consolation, to a straight hymn, "Don't Just Do Something" (Pierce's take on ennui) to a blend of the orchestral and Dean Martin cocktail pop. The Beach Boy element is particularly pronounced on "Do It All Over Again," in which Pierce struggles between offering supportive words to a lover and just preferring to do nothing. His voice, a deep, grainy instrument, adds to the dusky atmosphere.

As many have learned before, art rock can be a boondoggle. And sure enough, *Let It Come Down* heaves and groans under the burden of its aspirations. The mix can grow too congested, resulting in a muddy wall of sound. This approach particularly hurts "The Twelve Steps" and "On Fire," rockers that feel weighed down. (One of the few clearly heard effects on the former are the sirens, so lifelike—and familiar of late—they freaked me out.)

Yet despite the album's flaws, not to mention a musical premise that veers toward bombast, Spiritualized find beauty in the battle between optimism and gloom, an especially timely message. By the last song, "Lord Can You Hear Me," Pierce has moved beyond caustic remarks and is intoning "Lord, help me out/I'd take my life but I'm in doubt/Just where my soul will lie." He sounds as if he means it. On *Let It Come Down*, Pierce wants to continue partying like it's 1999, but he's also begun living up to the name of his band. **A–**

Rolling Stone
rollingstone.com
ALICIA
November 8, 2001

★★★½

Spiritualized

Let It Come Down

ARISTA

Maximum-impact chill-out rock

JASON PIERCE HAS MADE A CAREER of defying expectations. After making his name as the bass man for the great U.K. trance rockers Spacemen 3, he surprised everyone by rebounding strong with his own band, Spiritualized. But when Spiritualized seemed to have settled into their own pleasantly stagnant psychedelic groove, Pierce shook it all up with the 1997 epic *Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space*, a true masterpiece of cool waves and interstellar guitar. *Ladies and Gentlemen* sounded like a glorious fluke, but four years later, with a mostly different band, Pierce is back with *Let It Come Down*, a similar-minded album of chill-out rock. Nothing matches *Ladies and Gentlemen*'s high points in terms of sonics or songwriting, but Spiritualized still have that big sound: sweeping gospel choruses, piano, strings, horns, guitar freakouts and Pierce's lonely voice crying out for a shot of love to take the pain away. With expansive ballads like "Don't Just Do Something," "The Straight and the Narrow" and the ten-minute "You Won't Get to Heaven," *Let It Come Down* comes on like Side Three of *Exile on Main Street* with Keith on vocals and Brian Wilson conducting the orchestra. —ROB SHEFFIELD